



Portrait of Speros Vryonis Jr. in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, soon after the publication of his masterpiece, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*.

Speros Vryonis Jr.

(1928–2019)

JOHN S. LANGDON AND STEPHEN W. REINERT

On March 11, 2019, Speros Vryonis Jr. quietly passed away in Sacramento, California, having reached the venerable age of ninety. He died a titan in the fields of Byzantine, medieval Turkic and Balkan, and modern Greek studies. His contributions in all the foregoing were extensive and of enduring value. Throughout his long and extraordinary career, moreover, his associations with Dumbarton Oaks were numerous, including several research fellowships, service on its advisory bodies (the Board of Scholars, subsequently called the Senior Fellows Committee), and participation in colloquia and symposia, twice as symposiarch.¹ Some of his most significant articles were published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

Speros was born on July 18, 1928, in Memphis, Tennessee. His parents—Speros Sr. and Helen, née Touliatou—were immigrants from the island of Kefalonia who built up a prosperous bakery and meat company in downtown Memphis. In memoirs published some twenty years before his death,² Speros affirms that

his parents and their circle of local Greek friends shaped his basic identity, and planted the seeds of his future scholarly passions, within the first decade of his life. The Vryonis household was fully bilingual, and young Speros, gifted at languages, emerged by the age of six with competence in the Kefalonian Greek dialect of his parents and fluency in the standard English spoken in Memphis, with its particular regional accent which he never entirely lost. His parents, moreover, had arrived in America with sound educations that included a reverence for ancient Greek (in which both parents had some facility) as well as the glories of antique Hellas. For whatever reason, Speros Jr. came to share their enthusiasms—fascinated by his father's explanations of the differences between modern and ancient Greek, the latter of which the boy considered more “beautiful”; enthralled by the pagan Greek myths and legends told to him by his mother; mesmerized by a large collection of ancient Greek coins his mother had brought with her to Memphis; and at first challenged, then enchanted, by John Bagnell Bury's *History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great* (London, 1900), which he discovered in the family library. At the same time, in this early phase of his childhood development, Speros evolved a keen interest in the history and experiences of contemporary Greeks in the Balkans, Greece, and Asia Minor. Influential here were the Sunday noon dinners with family friends where political events abroad were intensely discussed and debated. Those invited often included veterans of the Balkan Wars and World War I,

1 Junior Fellow (1954–1956), Board of Scholars (1972–1974), Visiting Fellow (Fall 1979, Spring 1981, Spring 1982, Fall 1982, Spring 1984), Senior Fellows Committee (1985–1991), and Visiting Scholar (Spring 2007). The symposia over which Speros presided were “The Decline of Byzantine Civilization in Asia Minor, Eleventh–Fifteenth Century” (May 2–4, 1974) and “Byzantine Civilization in the Light of Contemporary Scholarship” (May 3–5, 1991).

2 S. Vryonis Jr., *The Vryonis Family: Four Generations of Greek-American Memories* (Melbourne, 2000). Salient are pp. 27–76 and the notes on pp. 77–91.

along with Greeks with previous life experiences in Istanbul, Egypt, Syro-Palestine, and Slavic countries. These conversations enkindled in young Speros an intense curiosity about “current events” in the eastern Mediterranean and aroused a desire to learn, eventually, what were to him the “exotic” languages of those lands, in particular Arabic, Turkish, and the Slavic tongues. The most significant of these political conversations, it would appear, was that between him and his father in December 1935, when Speros was seven, in which the elder Vryonis outlined for his son what transpired in the Greco-Turkish War of 1912–1922 and its impact on the Greeks of the Smyrna region. In consequence, remembers Speros:

It suddenly dawned on me that this had been a very important center of the Greeks from ancient times, and yet how was it that it had become Turkish? From this infantile encounter with a great historical change was born a curiosity that was to end in the writing of my book on the decline of medieval Hellenism and the process of Islamization in Asia Minor, over three decades later.³

Even more transformative was the journey his mother organized for herself and her son from Memphis to western Europe, and ultimately to Athens and Kefalonia, in the spring of 1937, when Speros was eight. It was for him a pilgrimage to the ancestral homeland, where he would encounter, for the first time, his relatives abroad, the contexts in which they lived, and the splendors of the Acropolis. En route, Speros was particularly moved by their stay in Venice. Their numerous visits to Saint Mark’s Basilica represented his first contact with Byzantine art and civilization, and he came to realize that as a Greek-American he might identify not only with the legacy of ancient Hellas but with that of Byzantium as well.⁴ What enthralled him most about this voyage were his experiences in Greece, which placed “the Greek seal on [his] American formation,”⁵

³ Ibid., 32. The full publication is *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA, 4 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986).

⁴ Vryonis, *The Vryonis Family*, 51.

⁵ Ibid., 46.

as he states in the aforementioned memoir. The beauty of the Parthenon on a searing hot afternoon firmly cemented the kinship he already felt with pagan Greek antiquity. The two months he spent with his maternal grandparents, in their village on Kefalonia, were an acculturation into the language and folkways of an intact Greek peasant society that enchanted him, and in which he felt himself loved and “at home.”

When Speros embarked on his overseas trip in spring 1937, he evidently was a third-grader at the Volentine Elementary School, a public school in Memphis. One year after mother and son returned from their voyage, Speros Sr. and Helen divorced and Speros Jr. was enrolled in the all-male Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon, Tennessee, some 240 miles northeast of Memphis. There, from age ten to sixteen, in a student body of five hundred or so fellow uniformed cadets, he completed fifth to tenth grades following a regimen and curriculum typical of such institutions. He finished his secondary education at Christian Brothers High School in Memphis.

In 1946, age eighteen, Speros matriculated at Southwestern in Memphis, a private liberal arts college in the Midtown neighborhood. Renamed Rhodes College in 1984, Southwestern attracted Speros because of its excellent academic reputation, broad liberal arts offerings, and the opportunity to work closely with dedicated professors in small class settings. A history major, he pursued an array of courses in ancient and medieval studies, and additionally worked intensively on his ancient Greek. For his honors thesis, he returned intellectually to his beloved ancestral island, producing a paper on “The History of Cephallenia from 3000 BC to 313 AD.”⁶ Speros deeply valued his undergraduate formation at Southwestern and was delighted when it awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in the Humanities in 1985.

Before continuing to graduate school, Speros resolved to deepen his knowledge of ancient Greek monuments and pursue archaeological research on the history of Kefalonia. With the support of a Fulbright Fellowship—the first of numerous major scholarships he would receive throughout his career—he spent the year 1950–1951 as a member of the American School of

⁶ Rhodes College, “Speros Vryonis ’50,” <https://news.rhodes.edu/stories/speros-vryonis-50> (accessed 3 April 2019); Vryonis, *The Vryonis Family*, 74, 77–78.

Classical Studies at Athens, immersing himself in the remarkable opportunities it afforded a budding scholar. He participated in the legendary fall “School Trips” to central and southern Greece, led by the distinguished archaeologist Eugene Vanderpool. He likewise followed the introductory seminars on epigraphy, numismatics, and Byzantine history and art. Most exciting for him was carrying out his own forty-day site survey of Kefalonia, with permissions secured through the American School. The results he recorded in a report entitled “A Historical and Archaeological Survey of Kephallenia.”⁷

Clearly Speros had decided to pursue a doctoral degree in history in his senior year at Southwestern and had set his sights upon Harvard University. That he chose to pursue a graduate program in Byzantine history is rather puzzling, given his passion for Greek antiquity and his ambition to explore classical archaeology at the American School. In an interview he gave for Rhodes College in August 2015, however, he clarified that he chose to move from ancient to Byzantine history under the influence of a particularly inspiring Southwestern professor, namely John Henry Davis, who convinced him that Byzantium was “a civilization that was still awaiting its researchers.”⁸ In any event, Speros was admitted to Harvard’s Department of History in 1950; received the MA in 1952; and was awarded the PhD in 1956, age twenty-eight, the subject of his dissertation being “The Internal History of Byzantium during the ‘Time of Troubles’ (1057–81).” His thesis director was Robert Lee Wolff. He additionally studied Byzantine texts with Milton V. Anastos both in Cambridge and while a junior fellow at Dumbarton Oaks from 1954 to 1956.

After receiving his PhD, Speros continued at Harvard another four years as an instructor in the Department of History and member of the newly

founded Center for Middle Eastern Studies.⁹ Aside from inaugurating his teaching career, he began studying the “exotic” eastern languages which had intrigued him from childhood (Classical Arabic, Turkish).¹⁰ Likewise he resolved that his next project would not be revising his dissertation for publication, but rather a comprehensive study of the “decline of Byzantine Hellenism and the phenomenon of Islamization in Anatolia from the eleventh through the fifteenth century,”¹¹ a theme, as indicated above, which had intrigued him since childhood. This would represent a formidable challenge, however, given the complexity of the topic and the daunting array of primary and secondary sources, in numerous languages, which would require careful analysis.

In 1960 Speros was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He was then thirty-two and would remain at UCLA for some twenty-eight years. He rose through the ranks rapidly, becoming Associate Professor with tenure in 1964 and Full Professor in 1966. Typically he taught an undergraduate sequence on Late Antique and Byzantine history, a course on Seljuk and Early Ottoman history, and a graduate seminar on Byzantine historical texts. These complemented Milton V. Anastos’s undergraduate offerings on Byzantine ecclesiastical and intellectual history and graduate seminars on the New Testament and Patristic texts.¹² In addition to teaching, Speros served as director of the Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies from 1972 to 1975 and again from 1979 to 1982. At three points in his

⁹ S. Vryonis Jr., *The Mechanism of Catastrophe: The Turkish Pogrom of September 6–7, 1955, and the Destruction of the Greek Community of Istanbul* (New York, 2005), xxxii.

¹⁰ At the height of his career, he would list a research facility in twelve languages other than English, namely Greek (classical, Byzantine, modern), Latin, Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, French, German, Spanish, and Italian—this verbatim from his curriculum vitae, dated 2005.

¹¹ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, vii.

¹² Anastos departed Dumbarton Oaks for UCLA in 1964, initially appointed in the Department of Classics and subsequently also in the Department of History. Down to his retirement in 1977, he worked closely with Speros in elevating UCLA to a nationally recognized center for Byzantine studies. Alongside this Anastos assembled a massive collection of ancient through Byzantine studies (ca. 40,000 holdings), which today resides at the University of Notre Dame’s Medieval Institute Library.

⁷ Vryonis, *The Vryonis Family*, 74, 78, and *American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Seventieth Annual Report, 1950–1951* (Princeton, NJ, 1951), 11, 20–22. Speros’s field report is stored in the American School’s Archives and Personal Papers, located in the East Wing of the Gennadius Library.

⁸ Rhodes College, “Speros Vryonis ’50.” Speros dedicated a collected studies volume published in 1997 to the memories of three of his Southwestern teachers, recording here that Davis “taught me historical and intellectual courage” (*Byzantine Institutions, Society, and Culture*, vol. 1, *The Imperial Institution and Society, Hellenism: Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern* 14 [New Rochelle, NY, 1993]), v.

career he also held appointments at other prestigious academic institutions. In 1966–1967 he was a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Chicago. From 1976 to 1980 he spent spring terms at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens as a Professor of Medieval and Modern History. From 1979 to 1984 he was a Visiting Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, usually in the spring term.

Speros's decades at UCLA were marked by an evolving scholarly production of exceptional quality and quantity.¹³ Throughout the first eleven years he was preoccupied with the exhaustive research and writing of the book which would establish his fame. In 1971, when he was forty-three, this appeared as *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. It was immediately and widely acclaimed as a monumental achievement which radically reshaped understanding of this great ethnocultural transformation in terms of overarching chronology, component dynamics, and ultimate outcomes. Along the way he published a popularizing survey (*Byzantium and Europe*) and an anthology on medieval historiography (*Readings in Medieval Historiography*), both targeted mainly for undergraduates, and a very respectable stream of articles foundational to *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, collected for republication also in 1971 (*Byzantium: Its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World*).¹⁴ Although Speros incorporated parts of his doctoral dissertation in *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, he never reworked it as a separate monograph.

Speros's subsequent publications in his UCLA period followed varied tracks. As director of the Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center, he organized, presided over, and contributed to five major international conferences, the proceedings of which he duly edited

or co-edited.¹⁵ Throughout the 1970s he envisioned his next major monograph to be a study of the transformation of the Balkans under Ottoman rule, applying the analytical paradigms of *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism* to the obvious next context. A book along these lines was projected as volume II of the University of Washington Press series entitled *A History of East Central Europe*, but it never reached fruition.¹⁶ What did emerge, year after year, was a phenomenal output of substantial articles (approximately forty by 1988), covering an amazing trajectory from Late Antique Syria-Palestine to seventeenth-century Kefalonia. The sixteen most important for his continuing work on Byzantium, the Turks, and Islam were reprinted in 1981.¹⁷ Parallel to this, Speros's range of scholarly interest was widening to contemporary Greece, as evidenced by a major conference he organized in 1987 focused on PASOK policies in the 1980s.¹⁸ He also launched a publication series, *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina*, which produced four volumes, and collaborated with Jelisaveta Stanojevich Allen in editing a revision of George Soulis's groundbreaking dissertation on the Serbs and Byzantium in the age of Stephen Dušan.¹⁹

15 *Aspects of the Balkans: Continuity and Change. Contributions to the International Balkan Conference Held at UCLA, October 23–28, 1969* (The Hague and Paris, 1972), co-edited with H. Birnbaum; *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages. Fourth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 11–13, 1973, Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles* (Wiesbaden, 1975); *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam. Fifth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 23–25, 1975, Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Los Angeles* (Wiesbaden, 1977), co-edited with A. Banani; *The "Past" in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* 1 (Malibu, 1978); *Islam's Understanding of Itself. Eighth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 1–3, 1981, Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Los Angeles* (Malibu, 1983), co-edited with R. G. Hovannianian.

16 See the series list in P. F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804*, A History of East Central Europe 5 (Seattle and London, 1977), ii. A glimpse of what Speros intended is evident, however, in the manual for his University of Athens course on Balkan history, namely, 'Ιστορία τῶν Βαλκανικῶν λαῶν [History of the Balkan Peoples] (Athens, 1979).

17 *Studies on Byzantium, Seljuks, and Ottomans: Reprinted Studies*, *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* 2 (Malibu, 1981).

18 These proceedings were published as S. Vryonis Jr., ed., *Greece on the Road to Democracy: From the Junta to PASOK, 1974–1986, Hellenism: Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern* 5 (New Rochelle, NY, 1991).

19 The volumes in *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* are: Vryonis, *The "Past" in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture* (n. 15, above);

13 For a bibliography of Speros's publications down to 1992, see J. S. Allen, "Bibliography of Speros Vryonis, Jr.," in *Tō Ελληνικόν: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, vol. 1, *Hellenic Antiquity and Byzantium*, ed. J. S. Langdon, S. W. Reinert, J. S. Allen, and Ch. P. Ioannides (New Rochelle, NY, 1993), xxxvii–xlvi.

14 *Byzantium and Europe*, History of European Civilization Library (New York, 1967); *Readings in Medieval Historiography* (Boston, 1968); *Byzantium: Its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World: Collected Studies*, with preface by Milton V. Anastos (London, 1971).

By the mid-1980s Speros had reached a point in his career where he felt it best to move beyond UCLA and explore new challenges.²⁰ He was equally concerned that post-classical Hellenic studies were poorly represented in American and European universities, and drew the conclusion that an alternative support context was needed to assist their survival and proliferation, particularly on the West Coast. Thus, in the summer of 1985, with the backing of several prominent Greek-Americans, in particular Angelo K. Tsakopoulos, plans were laid for the development of a California-based center for the study of Hellenism, from antiquity to modernity, to be named in honor of Speros's eldest son, Speros Basil, who earlier that year had tragically died at the age of twenty-eight. Four years later the Speros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism would open its doors in a location in Rancho Cordova, eleven miles east of Sacramento. In the interim, Speros devoted considerable time and resources building up a library necessary for its mission and activities.²¹

In 1988 Speros was indeed able to depart Los Angeles when he was simultaneously appointed the founding director of New York University's newly established Alexander S. Onassis Center for Hellenic Studies and the first Onassis Professor of Hellenic Culture and Civilization. His tenure here spanned five eventful years, down to 1993. His mission was to create the finest institution in the United States for research

Vryonis, *Studies on Byzantium, Seljuks, and Ottomans* (n. 17, above); S. Vryonis Jr., *A Brief History of the Greek-American Community of Saint George, Memphis, Tennessee, 1962–1982*, *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* 3 (Malibu, 1982); and S. Vryonis Jr., ed., *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos*, *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina* 4 (Malibu, 1985). For the complex editorial work Speros and Mrs. Allen carried out in revising Soulis's dissertation, see G. C. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium during the Reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan (1331–1355) and His Successors*, ed. S. Vryonis Jr. and J. S. Allen (Washington, DC, 1984), vii–ix.

20 At UCLA, what Speros viewed as the indifference of deans and even fellow faculty to values so fundamental as academic freedom, the maintenance of scholarly standards, and equitable rewards for high-quality contributions disturbed him deeply. For the turning point, see his lengthy review of S. J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 1, *Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280–1808* (Cambridge, 1976), in *Balkan Studies* 24.1 (1983): 163–286.

21 For the early history of the center, see G. I. Paganelis, "The Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection at California State University, Sacramento: A Beacon of Hellenism in the Western United States," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 26 (2008): 19–27.

and teaching on Hellenic history and culture, from antiquity to the present. He labored on many fronts, establishing an undergraduate and graduate curriculum, which by 1993 included some eighteen courses; hiring five new faculty members in core disciplines of Hellenic studies; assembling a substantial library in support of these academic programs; administering a richly endowed scholarship program for undergraduates and graduates; appointing distinguished visiting scholars to enhance the Onassis Center's regular offerings; and building an extensive cultural outreach program (including lectures, conferences, art exhibits, and concerts).²² Memorable activities sponsored wholly or in part by the Onassis Center under Speros's watch included a 1990 NYU conference on "The Greeks and the Sea," at which the Onassis Gold Medal for Excellence in Hellenic Studies was inaugurated,²³ and twin conferences held at UCLA in 1990 and 1991, which resulted in a volume of important studies on the Slavs and eleventh-century Byzantium.²⁴ On other fronts, Speros participated in celebrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Dumbarton Oaks (1990)²⁵ and delivered the first of the annual lectures honoring Sir Steven Runciman at King's College London (1991).²⁶ He continued to be closely involved as a Trustee in the ongoing development of the Speros Basil Vryonis Center, which he envisioned as the West Coast complement to the Onassis Center at NYU. During these years additional honorary degrees were awarded by the University of Thessaloniki (1992) and Adelphi University (1993).²⁷

22 J. Brademas, "Foreword," in *Tō Ἑλληνικόν*, vol. 1, xxv–xxvii.

23 The proceedings were published as S. Vryonis Jr., ed., *The Greeks and the Sea, Hellenism: Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern* 18 / Gold Medal Series 1 (New Rochelle, NY, 1993), vii–xii and 3–21.

24 S. Vryonis Jr., ed., *Byzantine Studies: Essays on the Slavic World and the Eleventh Century*, *Hellenism: Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern* 9 (New Rochelle, NY, 1992). To this Speros contributed "The Slavic Pottery (Jars) from Olympia, Greece," 15–42, and "The Greek and Arabic Sources on the Battle of Mantzikert, 1071 A.D.," 125–40.

25 S. Vryonis Jr., "Byzantine Civilization, A World Civilization," in *Byzantium, A World Civilization*, ed. A. E. Laiou and H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1992), 19–35.

26 In a letter to John S. Langdon, dated 6 January 1992, Speros wrote: "[Sir Steven] was present, looking well, and was as chipper and naughty as ever."

27 Later, in 2003, Speros was also so honored by the University of Cyprus.

Speros's own scholarly production during his NYU period remained unflagging. During those years he published fourteen substantial new articles on Byzantine, early Ottoman, and Orthodox Balkan topics. In addition to the aforementioned edited conference proceedings, he boldly challenged what he saw as the contemporary Turkish government's agendas to influence American scholarship and academe in *The Turkish State and History: Clio Meets the Grey Wolf* (Thessaloniki, 1991).²⁸

By 1993 Speros was satisfied that he had carried out his mandate to establish the Onassis Center as a globally respected institution for research in and teaching of Hellenic studies. He thus retired, at the age of sixty-five, and returned to California to devote his energies to the further development of the Speros Basil Vryonis Center. In that year, fifty-three of his students and colleagues honored him with a two-volume Festschrift celebrating "his versatility in and love of all things Greek, from the Achaian age to modern times, including reverberations in kindred cultures—in short, τὸ Ἑλληνικόν."²⁹ At the Speros Basil Vryonis Center, Speros served as ongoing Trustee, Director of Studies (1995–1996),³⁰ and then as Director (1996–2000). Much of his energy was devoted to assembling a vast research collection in Hellenic studies, which by 2000 numbered some 65,000 volumes and thus constituted one of the largest of its kind in the United States.³¹ He likewise was engaged in helping the Center carry out its other key objectives—organizing scholarly conferences and lectures, advising on publications,³² hosting

28 This monograph was not published under the auspices of either the Onassis or Speros Basil Vryonis Centers, but rather the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki.

29 "Organizers' Preface," in *Tὸ Ἑλληνικόν*, vol. 1, xiii. For full citation of volume 1 of this Festschrift, see n. 13. The second volume is entitled *Byzantinoslavica, Armeniaca, Islamica, the Balkans, and Modern Greece*.

30 For a semester in 1996, Speros was concurrently in residence at the University of Washington as the Solomon Katz Professor of the Humanities.

31 Paganellis, "The Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection," 21.

32 Over the course of its existence, the Center published two series: Hellenism: Ancient, Mediaeval, Modern (twenty-one titles), and Subsidia Balcanica, Islamica & Turcica (seven titles). The Byzantina kai Metabyzantina series (see n. 19) was carried over as the first four volumes in the Hellenism series. Subsequently Speros authored or edited four more volumes in the Hellenism series (see nn. 8, 18, 23, and 24). Also intended for this series was the two-volume *Graecoturcica*:

visiting scholars, and deploying cultural outreach to the West Coast Hellenic community.

Throughout the eight years in which Speros was directly involved with the Speros Basil Vryonis Center, he continued publishing articles (some twenty between 1994 and 2001) ranging from his favorite ancient preoccupations (notably the "Greeks and the Sea") through themes of middle Byzantine history, modern Greek and Balkan ethnic perceptions, and Greco-Turkish politics. His aforementioned memoirs of his youth, and chapters from the history of his family on Kefalonia, appeared in 2000.³³ By that year he was deeply engaged in research for what would be his second large book, an exhaustive exegesis on how the riots in Istanbul of September 6–7, 1955, constituted a pogrom organized by the Menderes government against the Greeks, and to a lesser degree Armenians and Jews, of the city.

In the summer of 2000, the Speros Basil Vryonis Center's board resolved that the center should be closed and a new context be found to serve its original educational goals more effectively. The dynamics behind this decision were complex, but essentially the center had reached the limit of fiscal and scholarly sustainability under its original design, its location was a formula for isolation, and board members were disappointed that the non-circulating collection seemed to be of limited benefit to the wider community, scholarly and non-scholarly.³⁴ While this development was a profound disappointment for Speros, he at least had the satisfaction of seeing the library migrate to Sacramento State University in 2002 through a generous donation by Trustee Angelo K. Tsakopoulos, where it has not only been preserved but significantly expanded.³⁵

Collected Studies on the Interaction between the Greek World and the Turks (announced as vols. 20 and 21), but these were never published. In the Subsidia Balcanica, Islamica & Turcica series, Speros contributed "Byzantine Constantinople and Ottoman Istanbul: Evolution in a Millennial Imperial Iconography" to *The Ottoman City and Its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order*, ed. A. I. Bierman, R. A. Abou-El-Haj, D. Preziosi, Subsidia Balcanica, Islamica & Turcica 3 (New Rochelle, NY, 1991), 13–52.

33 Vryonis, *The Vryonis Family*. In 1985 Speros had written a kindred book—*A Brief History of the Greek-American Community of Saint George, Memphis, Tennessee 1902–1982*—in which his father is a prominent figure (see n. 19).

34 Paganellis, "The Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection," 21.

35 Ibid.

Following the closure of the Speros Basil Vryonis Center, Speros soldiered on in fruitful scholarly pursuits within the sanctuary of his home in El Dorado Hills, California, with his beloved wife Badri (an accomplished sculptor in her own right) and sons Demetrios and Nikolas close at hand. It was there that he organized the editing of approximately half of Milton V. Anastos's as yet unpublished masterpiece, which Speros characterized as a grand "analysis of the formal cultural or civilizational forms of Byzantine society" and which Milton and his disciples affectionately termed "MOB" (i.e., Mind of Byzantium).³⁶ Four years later appeared *The Mechanism of Catastrophe: The Turkish Pogrom of September 6–7, 1955, and the Destruction of the Greek Community of Istanbul* (New York, 2005). The definitive study of this melancholy episode, it likewise represents an extension of Speros's lifelong engagement with the fate of the Greeks under Turkish rule in Anatolia. Thus it is not surprising that he next returned to *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism* for substantial revisions and emendations, published in New York in 2011. Thereafter Speros continued his labors on several ambitious projects, notably an authoritative history of the Battle of Manzikert, which alas he was unable to complete.³⁷ As with the previous periods of his scholarly life, the regular flow of articles continued, with an additional dozen in print between 2002 and the time of his passing.

Befitting his scholarly prominence, Speros was elected to membership in numerous academic societies. Among these were the Medieval Academy of America

³⁶ Milton V. Anastos, *Aspects of the Mind of Byzantium: Political Theory, Theology, and Ecclesiastical Relations with the See of Rome*, ed. S. Vryonis Jr. and N. Goodhue, Variorum Collected Studies Series 717 (Aldershot, 2001). Speros's characterization of MOB appears on p. x.

³⁷ He outlined this project in his 2005 application for a semester of research fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks, which was awarded for Spring 2007.

(1974), the American Philosophical Society (1974), the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1976), and the Academy of Athens (1992). An honor which particularly moved him was his receipt of a medal as Commander of the Order of the Phoenix from the Greek government in 1999.

At his death in 2019, Speros left behind a rich record of formidable scholarship, uncompromising devotion to historical truth, passionate concern for the fate of Hellenic studies in the United States, and selfless kindness to students³⁸ and friends. What he wrote of his longtime mentor and colleague, Milton V. Anastos, applies in equal measure to him: "Your immediate colleagues, students, and friends love and esteem you . . . *hōs andra sophon kai dēmokratēn*."³⁹

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³⁸ Speros chaired five doctoral committees at UCLA (Lowell Clucas 1975, Harry Turtledove 1977, John Langdon 1978, Stephen Reinert 1981, Frank Trombley 1981). His sixth UCLA PhD would have been Sarolta Anna Takács, who pursued doctoral studies in Byzantine history under Speros's direction until he departed for NYU in 1988. Speros also advised several other graduate students at NYU.

³⁹ Vryonis, "Preface," in *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos*, x.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO NICHOLAS GOODHUE for his generous bibliographical and editorial advice. Our thanks also to the Director and staff of Dumbarton Oaks for providing us with an accurate listing of Speros's affiliations there.

